

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 EA-10 ISO-00 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7740

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

USIA WASHDC

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SUBJECT: FRENCH PUBLIC REACTION TO SHOOTING OF AFP
CORRESPONDENT.

SUMMARY: ALL FRENCH MEDIA, ACROSS THE POLITICAL
SPECTRUM, CONDEMN THE SHOOTING OF PAUL LEANDRI IN SAIGON
ANTI COMMUNIST AURORE AND COMMUNIST HUMA-
NITE CARRY THE SAME HEADLINE (MARCH L7): "FRENCH JOURNAL-
IST MURDERED BY SAIGON POLICE." CONDEMNATION IS
EXPRESSED BY THE PRESIDENT AND OTHER PUBLIC FIGURES,
MOST NOTABLY THE PRESIDENT OF AGENCE FRANCE
PRESSE.

L. THE FOLLOWING QUOTES ARE TYPICAL OF THE FRENCH
PRESS REACTION, WHICH IS UNANIMOUS IN CONDEMNING
SHOOTING BY THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE
POLICE; MINUTE (RIGHTIST WEEKLY): "REVOLTING AND
IGNOBLE, THIS ASSASSINATION OF OUR CONFRERE PAUL LEANDRI
BY A SOUTH VIETNAMESE POLICEMAN. WHATEVER THE GRUDGE
THE SAIGON POLICE MIGHT HAVE HAD AGAINST THE AFP JOUR-
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NALISTS, NOTHING CAN JUSTIFY SUCH METHODS OF KILLERS."

AUORE (CONSERVATIVE DAILY USUALLY FAVORABLE TO SOUTH VIETNAM): " PAUL LEANDRI KILLED BY THE SAIGON POLICE...HIS DEATH AROUSES WIDE INDIGNATION IN ALL POLITICAL CIRCLES ALL OVER THE WORLD, INSOFAR AS IT CAN BE ASCRIBED TO INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE LEADING TO MURDER." LE QUOTIDIEN DE PARIS (LEFT-OF-CENTER DAILY): "PAUL LEANDRI, THE AFP CORRESPONDENT IN SAIGON WAS KILLED BY SOUTH VIETNAMESE POLICEMEN FRIDAY NIHT...THE OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE SUBSEQUENTLY ISSUED BY THE POLICE 'COVERS' AND EVEN EXCUSES THE DOINGS OF POLICE OFFICIALS: 'LEANDRI IS SAID TO HAVE ADOPTED AN INSULTING ATTITUDE.' THIS IS ENOUGH TO BE SENTENCED TO DEATH IN SOUTH VIETNAM."

2. MOST LENGTHY COMMENTS APPEARED IN FIGARO AND LE MONDE (IT IS TO BE NOTED THAT DECORNOY, AUTHOR OF LE MONDE'S STORY, IS KNOWN FOR HIS ANTI-GVN VIEWS): FIGARO STORY BY FORMER AFP COLLEAGUE MAX COIFFAIT TITLED "DEATH OF A WITNESS": "STUPOR, INDIGNATION. THE IMMEDIATE REACTION OF THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT IS SHARED BY THE ENTIRE WORLD. LEANDRI, AN ACCURATE, HONEST WITNESS WAS MURDERED -- THERE IS NO OTHER WORD TO DESCRIBE HIS DEATH... LEANDRI HAD QUOTED THE TESTIMONY OF A SOUTH VIETNAMESE PRIEST THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS WERE PRACTICALLY NOT PARTICIPATING IN THE BATTLE FOR BAN ME THUOT. THE SAIGON REGIME DOES NOT PERMIT SUCH REPORTS. THE POLICE TRIED TO EXTORT FROM LEANDRI THE NAME OF HIS INFORMER. FAITHFUL TO WHAT HONORS HIS PROFESSION, HE REFUSED TO SPEAK AND DIED FOR THAT...HOW CAN THE THIEU GOVERNMENT STILL DARE TO PRETEND THAT IT DEFENDS FREEDOM?" LE MONDE STORY BY JACQUES DECORNOY: "WHETHER OR NOT HIS MURDER WAS PREMEDITATED, PAUL LEANDRI WAS MURDERED... LEANDRI DID NOT WANT TO REVEAL THE SOURCES OF HIS REPORTS ...LEANDRI WAS NOT BRIBABLE...BELYING THE OFFICIAL PROPAGANDA AS HE DID IS VERY EXPENSIVE IN SAIGON. THE LEADERS IN SAIGON, TO BE SURE, HAVE REASONS FOR BEING NERVOUS...BUT HOW CAN FRANCE COOPERATE WITH A REGIME WHOSE POLICE OFFICIALS PULL OUT THEIR SUBMACHINE GUNS WHEN THEY HEAR THE WORD 'REPORTING'?"

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3. PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING SAID IN A TELEGRAM OF CONDOLENCES TO LEANDRI'S WIDOW THAT HE WAS DEEPLY MOVED BY HER HUSBAND'S DEATH "WHICH TOOK PLACE UNDER REVOLTING CIRCUMSTANCES."

4. JEAN MARIN, PRESIDENT OF AFP SAID IN A FORMAL STATEMENT: "IT IS ALREADY CLEARLY ESTABLISHED, BEFORE ANY INQUIRY, THAT IF LEANDRI HAS NOT BEEN A JOURNALIST, HE

WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN KILLED. IT IS THE JOURNALIST WHO
WHILE REPORTING UNQUESTIONABLE FACTS AND STATEMENTS
WROTE A DISPATCH WHICH DISPLEASED THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES.
IT IS THE JOURNALIST WHO, BECAUSE OF THAT DISPATCH, WAS
SUMMONED, FIRST TO THE IMMIGRATION SERVICE AND
THEN TO THE SECURITY. IT IS THE JOURNALIST WHO, TIRED

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OF WAITING FOR HOURS WHILE HE WAS NOT ARRESTED OR IN
CUSTODY, WANTED TO GO BACK TO HIS OFFICE. IT IS THE
JOURNALIST WHO WAS KILLED. TO CLAIM THAT I WAS HIS
FAULT BECAUSE HE LOST HIS TEMPER AMOUNTS TO CONFESSING
THAT ONE CAN KILL A MAN FOR A FIT OF ANGER, AFTER ALL
QUITE UNDERSTANDABLE."

5. AFP UNION REPRESENTATIVES SAID: "THE AUTHORITIES OF
SAIGON BEAR TOTAL AND INEXCUSABLE RESPONSIBILITY IN
THIS MURDER. THIS CRIME, TOGETHER WITH THE ADMINIS-
TRATIVE HARRASSMENT TO WHICH OUR COLLEAGUE WAS

SUBJECTED, MUST BRING ABOUT A STRONG CONDEMNATION OF A
REGIME THAT STILL DARES TO AVAIL ITSELF OF THE DEFENSE
OF LIBERTIES." THE UNION OF JOURNALISTS SAID IN A
COMMUNIQUE: "NOT ONLY THE WHOLE OF OUR PROFESSION HAS
BEEN STRICKEN WITH THE SHOOTING OF AN UNARMED
COLLEAGUE, BUT SUCH AN ACT ALSO CONSTITUTES A REAL
AND PAINFUL ATTACK ON THE PRINCIPLES OF THE FREEDOM OF
THE PRESS." AT THE END OF A DEMONSTRATION BEFORE THE
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AFP HEADQUARTERS IN PARIS TUESDAY AFTERNOON, A DELEGA-
TION OF THE UNION OF JOURNALISTS WENT TO THE EMBASSY
OF SOUTH VIETNAM TO DELIVER A PROTEST.
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